

GOOD STORIES FOR CHILDREN

By Walt McDougall

How Little Oscar and His Doppelgangers Destroyed the Child-Eating Colliwobble



THE COLLIWOBBLE IN PURSUIT

NE day Oscar Frisbiele heard his Uncle Ike speak of a "Doppelganger," and promptly, of course, asked him what a "Doppelganger" was.

At first his uncle seemed rather unwilling to tell him, but Oscar persisted, and finally Uncle Ike asked him if he believed in spooks.

"Of course not," replied Oscar. "Everybody knows that there are no such things as spooks. Nobody but ignorant children believe in them nowadays."

"Well, then," said Uncle Ike, "a Doppelganger is a spook."

"You mean, I suppose, that people used to believe that there was a spook called a Doppelganger," remarked Oscar.

"Exactly. Long ago, when everybody thought that ghosts and things really roamed around at night, they had all sorts of spooks, and among them a special kind that was a double of someone else—that is, the spook resembled some person so exactly that no one could tell the difference at all. It was just like looking at yourself, when you saw your own Doppelganger, and it was said that if you saw this sort of spook something dreadful was going to happen to you quick. Seeing double, perhaps, was more frequent in those days, for now nobody ever sees a Doppelganger anywhere—at least, I have never read in the papers of such an occurrence."

"It would be a dreadful thing," said Oscar, reflectively, "to look up suddenly and see yourself sitting there beside you or walking along with you. It would give me the wobbles."

"Yes, indeed," added his uncle. "Or to wake up and find yourself in bed beside yourself some night."

"Why, you wouldn't know which was which," said Oscar, "and you might kick yourself out of bed by mistake."

"I am glad there are none now, anyhow," said Uncle Ike as he went out.

Visit to the Wiseacre

Oscar thought much about this conversation as he went to school, and therefore when he saw on a tiny sign beside a door the name "A. Doppel. Wiseacre," he was quite interested. He passed the door twice a day for several days, and then knocked at it. A little old man, hardly larger than a dwarf, opened it, and Oscar went in and asked:

"Are you Mr. Doppel?"

"Yes," replied the old man. "What can I do for you?"

"I am quite interested in your name, and I wanted to know if you are related to the Doppelgangers."

"Certainly not," replied the man; "I wish I were, and I'd do a better business."

"What is your business?" asked Oscar.

"I am a wiseacre; that is, I have wisdom."

"By the acre?" inquired Oscar.

"Alas! no. It can't be measured by feet or yards. I wish it could, then I'd know what my stock in trade was."

"Do you sell it?" asked the boy.

"Yes; I furnish wisdom to people who need it."

"I'd like some when I get some money, but if you will let me have a little on trust I'll pay you later," said Oscar.

"What do you wish to know?" asked the wiseacre.

"Principally, I'd like to find out where I can see a Doppelganger, for I can't get them out of my head."

"I can't tell you," said the old man, "but I can tell you how to make them."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the boy. "That's just what I'd like to do."

The old man took a book from a closet and studied it a few moments, and said:

"It's easy enough. All you have to do is to place a large looking glass at midnight in the moonlight, and stand before it and say:

"Hrump! hrump! double me up!" three times, and there you are. That is, there will be another like you standing beside you."

Oscar thanked the wiseacre and went home. That night, as it happened, there was a full moon, and he stole out at midnight as directed and took with him the mirror from the parlor mantle. He placed it full in the moonlight, and standing before it said, "Hrump! hrump! double me up!" three times.

Suddenly he felt that there was something beside him, and turning saw himself, every feature, every button matching his own.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, and the other boy repeated the word and looked quite as amazed. Oscar looked around to see if anybody was about, and asked:

"Can you talk?"

"Now, see here! I won't let you come out with me if you can't remember to keep out of the way. You'll get me disliked by all these fellows."

When they heard him speaking to the

"Of course," replied his double, for that, I forgot to tell you, is what doppel means in German.

"I know all that you know and perhaps I remember even more of what you have learned than you do. Everything you ever read I remember quite well, and if you can't recollect a thing ask me and I'll recollect it for you."

"Well, that may come in handy at examination time," said Oscar. "I don't know what to do with you now I've got you. We will go to bed and think it over in the morning."

In the morning Oscar was troubled about the matter, and he decided to tell his mother what he had done. He took the doppel with him to the dining room, and you may imagine how startled his mother was when she saw two Oscars entering.

"Mercy on us!" she cried. "As if I didn't have trouble enough with one boy to clothe and feed!"

"I won't need clothes, for what you got for him will be repeated on me," said Oscar No. 2; "and as I don't have to eat at all, there will be no expense whatever."

"But I cannot tell you apart," she cried. "I do not know which is you!"

"You will notice, if you look carefully," said the double, "that I am slightly paler and somewhat less distinct than he is, and I will always have to stand somewhat behind him, so that in a little while you will be able to tell us apart quite easily."

"You seem to look younger, also," said Mrs. Frisbiele, as she examined them both. "It's funny to have twins in the house so suddenly, but I suppose I will get used to it in time. Will you both go to school?"

"No," said the double; "I will remain at home, and, in fact, I can do all the errands and things while Oscar is at school, so that we will be of help to you instead of a trouble. I see that he has forgotten to chop the wood, as you told him to do last night; he was so busy thinking about the looking glass. You see, things like that I can do for him, but I cannot keep his nails clean, his hair brushed or his shoes shined. He must do these things himself."

"Perhaps," said Oscar, "as I didn't learn all my lessons last night, it would be better if you went to school to-day instead of me, and I will chop the wood."

"No; for as you didn't learn your lessons, I don't know anything about them," said his double.

"Besides, that would be entirely wrong," added his, or, perhaps I should say, their mother. "You have no right to shift your burden on him."

"I'll tell you something more," said the double, as Oscar was starting for school; "if you need me all you have to do is to call me in a whisper, and I'll be beside you in a jiffy."

"They'll all see you," said Oscar.

"No, I will be invisible to all except those whom you wish to have see me," replied No. 2. "That's one of the good things about it."

So Oscar went to school, and No. 2 stayed home and did the chores.

Mrs. Frisbiele became quite accustomed to the state of affairs before her real son came home, and then was surprised somewhat, for already she had come to think of the double as really Oscar.

After dinner Oscar said: "I promised to go and play with the Chubb boys this evening, and I guess if you don't mind you'd better become invisible, or else they will be scared."

"All right," said No. 2. "I'll go along and I'll have just as much fun as you have, even if they can't see me."

Although the double was unseen he played with the others, and sometimes he forgot himself and got in the way so that he tripped the other boys up, or bumped into them, and after awhile it somehow became plain to them that there was something queer about the game of "prisoners' base" which they were playing, and finally one of them said:

"I won't play any more. There's something I can't see bumping into me every little while, and I'm scared!"

"I felt it two or three times!" said another; "but I thought something was wrong with my eyes, and I didn't say anything."

They all sat down on the curb with frightened faces and Oscar felt that they were all looking at him suspiciously. The double looked guilty, for he knew that he was to blame. Oscar turned to him and said sharply:

"Now, see here! I won't let you come out with me if you can't remember to keep out of the way. You'll get me disliked by all these fellows."

When they heard him speaking to the

empty air, all the boys stared at him, and one of them said: "Oscar's nutty, sure! He's talking to himself!"

But one of the boys, wiser than the others, suspected something, and, seeing Oscar's guilty look and flushed face (for Oscar realized at once that he had forgotten himself and spoken to his double), he cried, "He's got somebody here with him that we can't see. He's a wizard!"

All the boys sprang up and ran away crying, "Wizards! wizards!" as if they were chased by wolves. Oscar looked serious, for he knew it would be all over the school by morning.

"There now!" he exclaimed. "You see what you've done by your carelessness!"

"Let them tell it to all their parents," said his double, laughing. "Nobody will believe them. In fact, people will think that they are crazy if they go around saying that you had an invisible companion. Would you believe it yourself?"

Oscar was forced to admit that he would not, and it was just as the double had predicted. All the teachers were quite angry at the tales the other boys told and punished them for repeating what they considered the most childish nonsense. Oscar, however, was so disturbed by the occurrence that he wouldn't allow his double to play with the other boys afterward. Often, because the double was very lonely, they would go away and play together, but even that was dangerous, as it was almost impossible to go anywhere without somebody overhearing them, and soon people began to tell strange tales about Oscar shouting and laughing all by himself.

It is such an uncommon thing for a lad to do this that they began to suspect him of being weak-minded, and soon none of the other children would play with him or associate with him, for most of the people were very superstitious in the village and feared that he might affect others.

Mr. Doppel Vanishes

So little by little he drew away from his double and left him more and more alone. He was sorry for him, but he felt that it was the only safe thing to do. He went to see Mr. Doppel, to find out how to get rid of his double, but, alas, the old wiseacre had moved to another town, as his business had become very bad indeed, and no one knew where he had gone.

One morning Oscar awoke hearing voices in his room, and turning over he was so startled that he almost fell out of bed. There beside him sat two doubles, side by side, looking guiltily at him.

"Gee whiz!" he cried, sitting up. "What has happened?"

One of them, looking more scared and guilty than the other, replied:

"I was so lonely that I couldn't help it."

"What have you done?" asked Oscar.

"I took the mirror out into the moonlight last night and made myself a double," replied Number Two, "for I was tired of being left alone all the time."

"You've got a nerve!" said Oscar. "Now he'll go and do the same thing, and where will it all end, I'd like to know? I'll soon have a couple of dozen of you hanging around me."

"No, we can amuse ourselves well enough and not be lonely now," replied Number Two.

"I'll take mighty good care to see that you are kept invisible, anyhow," said Oscar. "You must promise me, both of you, not to repeat this performance, for I won't have any more doubles. I'd soon be a regular multiplication table if I let

bor's only a few blocks away never returned, and were never heard of again. Then big boys who were almost men and who had started moustaches and went courting the girls began to disappear, and then the girls themselves who went out at night.

Then, when hardly a boy or girl dared put his or her nose out of doors after dark, old folks, fathers and mothers, seemed to vanish from off the earth if they stepped over their thresholds, and a terrible fear fell upon the whole community. Somehow, Oscar, who out of pity had got into the habit of taking the two doubles out walking with him at night, had been spared, for he had never been troubled, and as he had never seen anything as he roamed about with them in the dark lanes he didn't suspect that anything was getting all the people, but guessed that they only ran away for some unknown reason.

One very dark night, however, as the three were sitting under a tree he heard

not to go out after any more, but just wait there quietly for his new teeth to come.

Oscar thought and thought, and finally Number Two spoke up and said: "I now remember that the Wiseacre Doppel said he had a sister living in Robinsonville. Let's go there and see if he hasn't gone to live with her."

"That's a good idea," said Oscar. "I wonder you didn't think of it before."

He went to Robinsonville, and sure enough he found Mr. Doppel there. The wiseacre looked very grave when Oscar asked him how they were to rid themselves of the Colliwobble, and thought a long time. Finally he said:

"There is one way, a way that was tried many ages since, but I am afraid it can't be worked a second time."

"What is it?" asked Oscar.

"Why, once upon a time it was given out that whoever went to the Colliwobble and answered correctly every one of the riddles the animal asked would have it

completely at his mercy, and it would be quite helpless. But I think it's perfectly hopeless, indeed."

"I don't," said Oscar, and went home. He got all the riddle books that were in the public library and all the people got together and told him every one they knew, riddles from away back that came over in the Ark, and the two doubles sat there and listened with him, for he depended on them to remember every one. When nobody could recollect another riddle he was ready to seek the Colliwobble.

Then he got a telegram from the wiseacre. It read: "Beware of the animal's breath. It's fatal."

After some thought he got a huge demijohn of strong ammonia, for that he knew would take away the Colliwobble's breath away, and then they started for the mountains at daybreak.

They heard the animal breathing long before they came to the cave where it was hidden, and then they boldly walked right up. The beast lay with its head outside and its body filling the opening, so that nobody could escape.

It shivered a little when it saw the three coming, for it was afraid of them.

"I am come," said Oscar, "to hear your old riddles. Go ahead and ask them quickly, for I suppose you have many."

Then it was really scared, for it had been such a long time since anybody had come to guess the riddles that it had forgotten hundreds of them, and it knew it. It thought for awhile until Oscar said:

"Come, wake up and get started, or it will be too late."

"Well, then, answer me this one," it said, very angry.

"It's an ancient Norse one and very hard. There was road about four hundred and road in every direction."

Oscar's double laughed and replied: "I remember that one: 'A bird flew above, a fish swam beneath; we stand on a bridge.'"

The Colliwobble grunted its gums together and tried again:

"It has eight feet, two eyes, it walks a tight-rope and its knees are higher than its head."

"Oh," said Number Two; "That's a spider in its web."

The Colliwobble thought a long time, then asked:

"What continually falls without hurting itself, is never silent, yet has no tongue, goes on but never leaves its bed."

"A waterfall," replied Number Three quickly, as if he was afraid of losing his chance.

The animal groaned, for it could scarcely remember any hard ones, then growled out: "Four were walking down hanging, two showing the way, two keeping off dogs, one always dirty, lags behind."

"That's another Norse one," said Oscar. "It's a cow, four feet, four legs on her udder, two eyes, two horns and her tail."

The Colliwobble sat up in a dreadful rage and tried to think. Finally it snapped out this:

"It has ten tongues, twenty eyes, forty feet; it moves along the road—"

"An easy one!" cried Number Two. "It's a sow with nine little pigs."

The Colliwobble turned pale, for it couldn't remember another riddle, and then it opened its mouth. Oscar saw at once that it was drawing in its breath to breathe some poisonous vapor upon them, and he smashed the demijohn of ammonia down upon the rocks, breaking it, and then he retreated some distance

When they reached the house he had seen, they found it empty and the door open, as the folks who lived there had been captured by the Colliwobble and had not yet returned. They entered and saw at once that there were dozens of mirrors

"Place yourselves in front of a looking glass at once and repeat the spell!" cried Oscar; "and do it as often and as long as possible, so that we can make a lot of doubles, quick!"

They threw the mirrors and looked at each other before a mirror and found it was "Hrump, hrump, double me up," as fast as he could, and in a minute the room was filled with Oscars.

Some were dimmer and paler than others, and the ones that he made himself, he noticed, were far more substantial, for of course each newly made one started in at once repeating himself, but all were just exactly like Oscar in every particular.

Pretty soon there was no room in the house any more, and he sent them outside and started over again. When the second batch was made and he was about to repeat the process, they heard the wheezing and grunting of the Colliwobble coming nearer and nearer. Oscar ran out and saw that it was coming directly for them, but its eyes were shut, for the ammonia had got into them and it was almost blind. The Colliwobble was mad all through. Although toothless it was still very dangerous, as its claws were all there yet, and it could rip a man up with one stroke. Oscar called out all his doubles and they were a little army in themselves. He told them to surround the animal and jump on its feet, so as to hold its claws down. Then others were to spring on its tail and back as soon as it was helpless.

They followed out his orders just as if they were his own, of course, understanding everything as well as he did, and in a moment the old Colliwobble was pinned down underneath a pile of boys that would have smothered an elephant. It tried to wiggle, but it was impossible, and after awhile it lay there breathless and perfectly helpless. They had knocked the thing completely out of it. Then they got ropes and tied it, after which they hauled it to the village, while some of them went to the cave for the little ones, the bushes and the rocks as they came along dragging the Colliwobble, and by the time they reached the village a multitude of men, women and children attended them and they were taken to the prison.

It was a triumphal entry for Oscar and his army of doubles, but they saw how the people's eyes did pop as they stared at them. They couldn't tell which was the real Oscar, and they all shook hands with the doubles so that each thought he had shaken hands with Oscar himself. When they had put the Colliwobble safe into a cage of iron and cooled down themselves, Oscar went home. Mrs. Frisbiele almost had a fit when she saw them coming in.

Just Like Congress

There were six hundred and eight doubles in all, and, of course, they could not begin to get indoors. So they sat around on the lawn and amused themselves telling what each one had done that day. They all got mixed up so that no one could tell which was Number Two (as if it made the slightest difference, but the question of age was very important to them), and the older ones put on quite a lot of airs as they told of their great experience of the world. They made a tremendous clatter, and several times Oscar had to go out and tell them to be still, as they were annoying the neighbors.

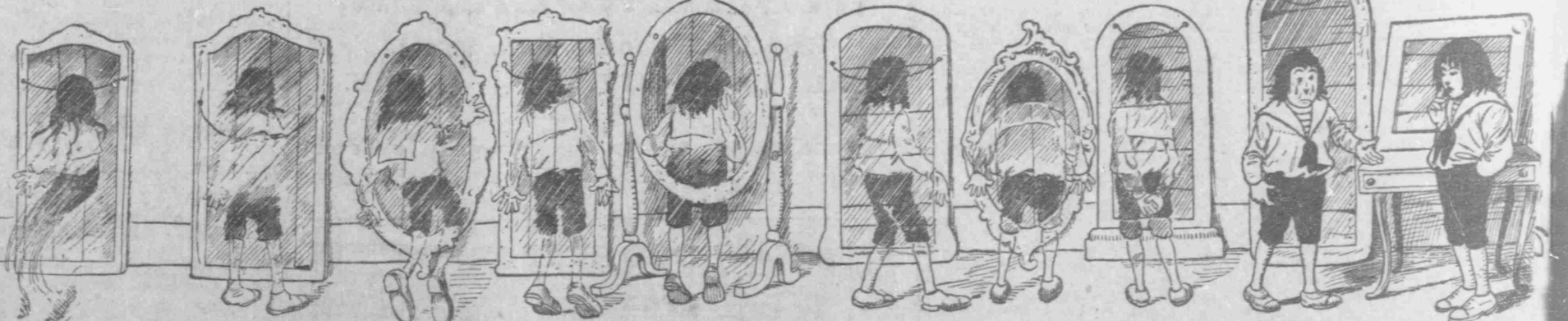
After a few days he found that he had brought upon himself a peck of care, as his doubles were constantly being mistaken for himself, and besides that thousands of people from other places came to see them and they grew so important and vain of the attention they attracted that they began to be distinctly different from himself, as he was a modest and unassuming lad. They swaggered all about the village and some of them learned to smoke cigarettes and swear, so that he soon cast about to find a remedy.

A mirror had been taken down and turned to the wall for several days, and during that time several of the double-doubles had vanished. Nobody thought much about it, but imagined that they had just gone off somewhere. As Oscar one day happened to be looking at the back of the mirror, he saw a double step before it and in an instant disappear. This attracted his attention, for such a thing had never happened before, and he told another double to stand there. This one also vanished in the twinkling of an eye. He thought now came to Oscar that the back of what he did the trick.

One after another he placed doubles before the turned looking glass, and wonder of wonders! each one vanished instantly and didn't return. The mirror-back absorbed them just as its face had absorbed them. He placed a dozen mirrors along the wall and stood his doubles, very displeased, of course, but still obedient, before them and saw them disappear as if blown away into air. At the end of the day all had gone except Number Two, and he pleaded and begged so hard to be allowed to remain that Oscar spared him to help take care of the Colliwobble.

So that is the story. The Colliwobble was a source of vast wealth to Oscar Frisbiele, and he grew very rich. Its teeth grew, but it never got out of the cage, and it never again got any babies or children to feed on, and in the course of time, being fed entirely on vegetables, it lost its fierceness and became very amiable, so that thousands of people came daily to hear it tell stories of the past and guess ancient riddles, which came back to it by practice, and so if you are good at guessing you may at any time by paying \$2 cents go there and guess a few waltzes.

WALT McDUGALL.



THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE DOPPELGANGERS